

## Testimony of Robert Karam, FACMPE

July 18, 2012

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of you today. My name is Robert Karam and I am an Administrator for a multi specialty physician group in Southwest Michigan. I am also the immediate past president of the Michigan Medical Group Managers Association. I am here today to ask that you please support and pass Senate Bills 1115 through 1118.

Michigan is in desperate need of physicians. In the Southwest Michigan area, as in many others around our State, the physician population is aging and the physicians willing to move to Michigan to practice medicine does not meet the demand for care that our patients need. As an Administrator I spend a good majority of time trying to find new ways to entice physicians to come to our practices as some of our current physicians look to retire and in those instances where we are looking to expand our practices.

I can personally attest to no less than five specialties where we have had significant difficulty in attracting physicians. In Neurology, Vascular Surgery, Otolaryngology and Cardiac Surgery we have experienced protracted difficulty in recruiting to these specialties. By far the most difficult recruitment we have undertaken is in the specialty of Dermatology. After nearly seven years of recruiting we were finally able to attract an individual to join our Dermatology Practice – and that is an individual who grew up in the Kalamazoo area. Patients seeking care in that practice are forced to wait 3 to 4 months to see a Dermatologist.

Additionally, I would offer three primary areas in which professional liability lawsuits impact our healthcare system:

First, is the toll upon the physicians who have dedicated their lives to caring for the people in our communities. They spend years becoming educated and subsequently a lifetime dedicated to improving the lives of their patients. However, when a lawsuit is filed against them, I have personally

seen the exacting toll it takes on their psyche, physical status and ability to function in their profession.

Second, are the consequences to patients – who may now be subjected to the practice of defensive medicine; the increase in time to see a physician as they are deluged with the efforts to fight a claim; and in some instances the reluctance of physicians to care for patients with particular ailments and/or some physicians leaving their practice due to liability claims.

Finally, are the socio-economic factors that come to be borne by our communities. The time physicians must take from their practices to fight suits is extremely difficult to measure but without question of a significant magnitude. While all of us are less than perfect, I have in the past 40 years directly witnessed the finite efforts physicians expend on behalf of their patients to continually insure they are providing the highest level of quality care available. The challenges that the deluge of lawsuits exact upon this process of healthcare has a very real negative impact upon all of us. Those consequences present in the forms of patients questioning care delivered to them, physicians questioning the care they provide and the advent of legal/societal processes that block the delivery of quality healthcare.

The reforms in these bills before you will provide the avenues for myself and others in my position to recruit physicians to cover those who need the care. The costs associated with care in our practices could very well be positively impacted as this bill package provides greater access to physicians while also protecting the rights of the patient.

I ask today for your support for this critical package of bills, Senate Bills 1115 through 1118. These bills will only positively change the medical climate in Michigan by providing the access for patients all over the state to the care they truly need. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions that I can.